

VZCZCXRO7396
PP RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHCI #0105 0881349
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 281349Z MAR 08
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1942
INFO RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0096
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 0024
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 2373

UNCLAS KOLKATA 000105

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS HHS, CDC, AND APHIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [AMED](#) [SENV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: LATEST AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN WEST BENGAL SPREADS TO JALPAIGURI

REF: KOLKATA 0084

¶1. SUMMARY: Avian influenza has spread to Northern West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district. A culler who fell sick in the AI-affected Malda district has shown no sign of H5N1 infection so far. The infection continues to spread as officials now put in place movement restrictions and culling. Villagers, not convinced about the response measures, continue to evade the restriction, abetting the spread of the virus. END COMMENT.

¶2. After resurfacing in Malda district in the second week of March, the H5N1 has now entered Jalpaiguri district in North Bengal (reftel). On March 27, Bhopal's High Security Animal Diseases Laboratory (HSADL) confirmed the presence of H5N1 in samples sent from a backyard poultry of Mondolghat village. The village is located near Jalpaiguri district headquarters, about 550 miles north of Kolkata.

¶3. Culling is scheduled to begin on March 28. The district administration and West Bengal Animal Resources Department (ARD) officials have moved 50 teams (each having 10 members) and hardware to cull around 50,000 poultry by March 30. Sale of poultry has been banned within a 6 mile radius of Mondolghat village.

¶4. Early this week, the media reported about a culler in Malda falling sick. Malda's Chief Medical Officer of Health's office told Post that 55-year-old male Haripada Das was a member of a culling team. Das came to work on March 21 with "smokers' cough" but was taken off duty on March 23 after doctors found him coughing. He does not have fever and is under quarantine and observation. There was no report of cullers showing signs of H5N1 infection.

¶5. Malda district administration is not allowing cullers to return home immediately after culling. They are quarantined at Malda District Sports Association facilities with policemen guarding them. Earlier, cullers could go back home with their pay. Malda administration is now allowing cullers to return only after the mandatory 10-day quarantine. Malda residents are complaining about not getting compensation or not getting the right amount.

¶6. On March 27, "The Telegraph" - a prominent daily newspaper published from Kolkata - reported that a couple had died of an unknown fever at the Sonamukhi block hospital in Bankura district, about 150 miles West of Kolkata. The report also said that a dozen other villagers were in hospital with high temperature and over 100 are said to be unwell in their village.

The Post spoke to the block Medical Officer of Health in Bankura who attended the patients. According to the doctor, this was an "isolated case" and he suspected some "chronic liver disease." The couple who died came to him with fever and had high bilirubin levels. It was too late by the time they came to the hospital, he said. No one else is admitted in his hospital with a similar problem.

17. COMMENT: AI in West Bengal remains limited to poultry and there have been no reported human AI cases. The state government's hasty decision to lift the ban on poultry movement within a month after the earlier January outbreak and ineffective controls appear to have contributed to the latest outbreaks. People in the affected areas are also not complying with the restrictions as they are not aware of AI's risks.

JARDINE